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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the relationship of urban reform and school reform to class conflict and assesses the adequacy of a class conflict model for explaining school reform in Atlanta in 1897. A model which explains urban reform (including school reform in urban areas) in class conflict categories is based on an ideology protective of middle-class interests and values at the expense of the interests and values of the poor, working class, and immigrants. The hypothesis is that urban and school reform are too complex to be explained by a class conflict model. The year 1897 was selected for this case study because so many school reforms were instituted during that year in Atlanta. Among these reforms were reduction in size of the school board, increase in the powers of the superintendent, implementation of school economies, and introduction of progressive curriculum innovations. The method of testing the effectiveness of class conflict categories in interpreting these and similar reforms involved assessing the process and content of Atlanta school reforms in light of the prevailing class-conflict model of urban reform. Findings indicated that the content of the Atlanta school reforms corresponds closely to the content of reforms described by the class conflict model. Findings also indicated, however, that most school reforms in Atlanta in 1897 were instituted by middle class reformers and by some of Atlanta's most prestigious civic leaders for the benefit of all citizens and, particularly, for working class and poor people who attended public schools. Consequently, the change agents and the processes of change did not correspond to those described by the class conflict model. The conclusion is that it was not class conflict which shaped urban school systems, but rather the demographic and economic transformation which overcame all major American cities around the turn of the century. (DB)

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DOES URBAN REFORM IMPLY CLASS CONFLICT?

THE CASE OF ATLANTA'S SCHOOLS

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Introduction

Urban reform in general and school reform in particular have frequently been interpreted in class conflict categories. Institutions created by reformers are said to have a middle class bias. The social forces behind the reform drive are said to have been upper class and upper-middle class elites. The ideology of efficiency and democracy which justified the reforms has been identified as an ideology protective of middle class interests and consistent with their values. At the same time, pre-reform institutions and practices have been celebrated as of working class, immigrant origin and sympathetic to working class interests and values. In the face of the reform steam roller lower-middle class, ethnic politicians defended these institutions on behalf of the immigrant community as best they could.

In this paper we shall explore the adequacy of this model for understanding school reform in Atlanta in 1897. We shall show that many of the classic school reforms were introduced into Atlanta's schools that year: the school board was reduced in size, the administrative powers of the superintendent were increased, school economies were implemented, and progressive curricular innovations were introduced. The defense of old practices was not led by working class politicians however, but by some of Atlanta's most prestigious civic leaders. The reformers were middle class, to be sure, but they had less social prestige than their opposition, and their political connections were so blatant that they were accused by their opponents of introducing politics into the public school system. After reviewing the movement for school reform in Atlanta we shall conclude that the sources of urban reform were more complex than the class-conflict model has often implied.

A scholarly consensus on urban reform has emerged over the past two decades. Most political scientists, sociologists and historians agree that changes in urban governance introduced in the first two decades of this century were the product of middle and upper-class elites, who had become disturbed by the rising power of working class, immigrant politicians and groups. Attacks on corruption and patronage, calls for efficient administration and scientific management, and demands for good government and citizen participation were all more or less well disguised campaigns to dismember institutional bastions of working-class power.[1]

Specific institutional changes were consistent with these overall objectives. Reformers introduced at-large elections because ward elections emphasized neighborhood attachments and ethnic connections important to working-class politicians. They called for non-partisanship, because the patronage-fed political parties were "machines" that not only mobilized working class votes but, in return, distributed special favors to immigrants when they needed help. Reformers called for the initiative, referendum, and recall because these more participatory mechanisms of citizen involvement were more likely to be used by middle class voters. Scientific administration required the professional expertise which only the educated middle class could provide.

Within this general consensus on the sources and consequences of urban reform there is, of course, a good deal of variability in interpretation. For some analysts, the reform movement is a reactionary effort by a declining social elite to retrieve some of the presumed moral virtues and social harmony of a rural past.[2] For other analysts, reform is an effort by a rising middle class to stabilize conflicts between big business and big labor.[3] For still others, reform is the mechanism chosen by monopoly capitalists to depoliticize the working class, thereby making possible a level of capital accumulation necessary to finance ongoing industrialization.[4] Yet all of these perspectives interpret urban reform in basically class-conflict categories; in nearly all the major accounts working class groups are perceived to be the "victims" of reform movements sponsored by middle and upper-class groups.

Studies of school reform have been written along much the same lines.[5] The major changes in urban school governance--smaller school boards, at-large elections, blue-ribbon advisory committees, fewer board committees, a professional, credentialed superintendent directing a large central office staff--are said to be devices by which middle class elites sought to break working-class influence over school policy. Curricular innovations introduced by reformers had a similar middle-class bias. Manual training and vocational education were designed to prepare the working class for work in mass-production facories. School testing allowed for the sorting and separating of students along class lines. Compulsory schooling insured that all children, even those from the most unruly segments of society, would be subjected to the disciplining influences of a highly regulated school day. The platoon system, junior high schools, and kindergartens were new organizational forms that allowed for the socialization of children of the working class in ways appropriate for the new industrial order. Campaigns for Americanization emphasized all too clearly that schools were expected to mold immigrant communities according to middle-class ideals.

Most of these analyses of urban reform have been carried out in Northern cities, and when attention has been paid to the South, the racist twists to populist and reform efforts have received the greatest emphasis. Yet the Southern experience with reform requires broader consideration. Southern cities differed dramatically from their Northern counterparts in a variety of ways at the turn of the century. Foreign immigrants represented a negligible fraction of the population in most Southern cities, while blacks were nearly as numerous as whites. Industrialization was barely underway in the region, and the urban working class was numerically small and politically weak. Economic and political power remained firmly in the grip of the traditional, white, "Bourbon" elite. It has yet to be established, however, whether the divergent political and economic characteristics of Southern and Northern cities spawned reform movements which differed significantly from one another either in the political process through which reform was carried out or in the content of the reforms which were implemented. In an initial effort to answer this question, the Atlanta experience with reform represents an especially promising test case. Atlanta was the Southern city most attuned to developments in the North, and it styled itself as the "Gate City" and the capital of the progressive "New South." If the class-conflict model of urban reform is appropriate for analyzing reform movements in any part of the South, it would presumably account for developments in Atlanta.

EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN ATLANTA

Reform came suddenly to the Atlanta public school system. On May 28, 1897, in a City Council meeting ostensibly called to consider some routine matters pertaining to the city's water works, a resolution was introduced by Alderman James G. Woodward which replaced the sitting seventeen-member school board with a new board comprising one member from each of the city's seven wards. Despite a recent escalation in the level of conflict between the school board and Mayor Charles Collier, the move came as a complete surprise to virtually everyone in Atlanta, including the five members of the English faction on the city council and all of the members of the school bard.[6] The vote on the measure was twelve - five, with members of the English faction in dissent.[7] The entire operation took only a few minutes.[8] As the Atlanta Constitution observed the next day:

> A Texas hanging couldn't have gone off with the precision and nicety of the sudden execution...The ax revolved and the heads were basketed.

The action of the Council raised an immediate public outcry in Atlanta: a mass meeting held the next day denounced the move as "illegal, revolutionary, despotic, and dangerous," and the city's newspapers gave the unfolding story front-page coverage and banner headlines for several days.[9] Within a week of the "astounding coup," however, the new board had organized itself and won the endorsement of both city newspapers, and the new members were setting themselves to the tasks of educational reform in the city's public school system.[10]

In this section of the paper we will assess the process and the content of the Atlanta school reforms in the light of the prevailing class-conflict model of urban reform. As will be seen, educational reform in Atlanta bears many resemblances to contemporaneous developments in other cities. In other respects, however, the 1897 reform of the Atlanta public school system differs decisively from reform movements in New York, St. Louis, and other Northern cities.[11]

A. The Content of School Reform

In some ways the Atlanta school reform fits rather well with the class-conflict model. In keeping with the model, the instigators of the reform movement were Mayor Charles Collier and Hoke Smith, both of whom were well-established members of the city's economic and political elite. Collier was a noted proponent of Henry Grady's "New South" ideology and an active advocate of Atlanta's economic growth and civic improvement. In this connection he had served as president of the corporation which had staged the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta in 1895, an event intended to attract entrepreneurs and northern capital to the Gate City and open up the city and the region for increased development and industrialization.[12] Smith was the editor of the Atlanta Journal, and an increasingly important political figure known for his "progressive" sympathies. He had served as Grover Cleveland's Secretary of the Interior in the early 1890's, and he was to be elected Governor

of Georgia in 1906. Like Collier, Smith was a vigorous proponent of Southern development and industrialization, and he maintained a lifelong interest in educational reform and especially vocational education.[13]

Collier had been elected in 1896 at the head of the Chamber of Commerce-dominated ticket of the English faction, and he came into office determined to administer the city according to "sound business principles."[14] Among his earliest legislative accomplishments was the passage of a substantial property tax cut, which benefited wealthy Atlantans considerably and reduced the expected revenues of the city by nearly $200,000.[15] The lingering effects of the national Depression required cutbacks in the level of city services and the salaries of municipal employees, and Collier -- like the leaders of reform movements in other cities -- was quick to demand that Atlanta's public school system be operated more economically and efficiently.

In a further parallel with educational reform movements elsewhere, the general concern for economy and efficiency within the Atlanta public school system expressed by Mayor Collier was coupled with a specific demand for reductions in the salaries paid to Atlanta's teachers. Declaring that the system was the most expensive and "the most extravagantly administered" in the United States, the Mayor expressed his unhappiness with the school board:[16]

> I have been surprised and mortified to find that this department was the only one disposed to hamper us in our efforts to put the city government on a business basis.

Shortly after his inauguration, Collier persuaded the school board to pass a 9 percent pay cut for all of the city's teachers. In addition, he pushed an ordinance through the city council which prohibited the school board from purchasing any supplies for the schools without the express authorization of the Mayor and the council.[17]

These efforts to enforce economy in the public school system were resisted by the school board and Atlanta's teachers. In his annual report to the Mayor and council, board president W. S. Thomson asserted the rights of the school board against those of the city's elected leaders:[18]

> I ask for the schools the best financial support that the condition of the treasury will admit of, and that the Board be permitted to exercise its judgement not only as to what shall be taught and who shall teach, but also what shall be paid, keeping within such appropriation as you shall make for the schools.

Though the board finally acquiesced to the Mayor and reduced teacher salaries, the cut was not as large as Collier had wanted, and Thomson chose to resign from the board rather than submit to Collier's demands.[19] Understandably concerned about the effects which the Mayor's economy measures would have on their standard of living, Atlanta's teachers supported the school board in its resistance to the Mayor; a few days after the salary reductions demanded by Collier had been passed, a petition signed by every teacher in the school system asked board president

W. S. Thomson to withdraw his resignation and return to office, and expressed the appreciation of the teachers for the board's efforts to protect their interests.[20]

The drive for economy in the administration of the school system was intensified after the abolition of the original school board. The newly-appointed board responded to the Mayor's demands for reduced expenditures by firing several teachers (including a number of principals,) cutting the length of the school year by a week,[21] and imposing additional salary cuts on the teachers in 1897 and 1898.[22] The approach of the new board was summed up by its president, Hoke Smith:

> As a rule the teachers are doing good work. The Board found it necessary to give up the services of some, and it may be necessary to give up the services of others, to the end that the best talent which we can obtain for the amount appropiated by the city may be found in all the school rooms.

As Table 1 makes clear, the economy measures implemented by Mayor Collier and the new board of education had a profound impact on the public school system of Atlanta. For the first time in the history of the system, instructional expenditures were reduced absolutely in 1897, and they remained below the level reached in 1896 until after the turn of the century. The level of total expenditures (including building and other capital expenses) was affected even more dramatically. Total expenditures were reduced more than 25 percent between 1896 and 1897, and in constant dollars they did not regain their former level until 1905. These reductions in the level of appropriations to the school system occurred in a period in which the population of Atlanta was increasing rapidly, and the cuts in educational expenditures thus resulted in increased class sizes and the exclusion of substantial numbers of would-be students from the schools for lack of space. Between 1896 and 1897 per pupil instructional expenditures were reduced more than 7 percent, and the reductions were even larger in succeeding years.[23]

The content of the Atlanta school reforms corresponds closely to the content of reforms described by the class-conflict model in other respects as well. The change in Board membership resulted in a shift of administrative power away from the school board to the administrative staff. The reduction in the number of members on the school board from seventeen to seven and the reduction in the number of board committees from ten to two served to limit the extent to which board members could personally involve themselves in the day-to-day administration of the school system. This shift in power was further encouraged by the addition of a full-time Assistant Superintendent to the administrative staff of the school system, and by an extension of the rights and responsibilities of the Superintendent. He and his assistant were permitted to participate fully in the meetings of the school board for the first time, and a variety of administrative tasks which had previously been handled by board committees -- including the adjudication of disputes between parents and teachers and the ordering of supplies -- were placed under his authority.[24] As was often the case in other cities, the Atlanta school reform thus

TABLE 1

ATLANTA SCHOOL EXPENDITURES (IN DOLLARS), 1878-1910

Year	Instructional Expenditures		Total Expenditures	
	Current	Constant[a]	Current	Constant[a]
1878	38,082	47,604	38,082	47,604
1882	49,258	57,278	59,743	69,469
1886	57,638	75,841	76,305	100,401
1890	89,309	114,500	136,374	175,300
1892	118,336	153,683	157,621	204,703
1894	136,386	186,832	136,386	186,832
1896	148,476	200,643	198,747	268,578
1897	141,999	189,332	141,999	189,332
1900	143,960	179,951	168,698	210,873
1903	190,197	216,019	197,294	224,198
1905	215,345	247,523	249,018	286,228
1907	266,486	280,513	382,741	402,885
1910	343,710	358,031	475,763	495,586

SOURCE: Atlanta, Board of Education, Superintendent's Reports, 1878-1910.

[a]1913 = 100.

resulted in an increase in the power of the administrative staff of the school system at the expense of the school board itself.

One further parallel is present between the reforms in Atlanta and those in other cities. The members of the new board came into office committed to the introduction of manual training courses into the curriculum of all the public schools. In his first annual report to the Mayor and council, board President Hoke Smith expressed h is desire "to see industrial work introduced all through our schools, and the minds of the children so trained as to fit them for the practical utilization of what they learn."[25] This wish was reiterated in the two succeeding years, and in 1900 a director of manual training was employed and a workshop was constructed in the Boys' High School. According to Smith, this was "simply the beginning of manual training. We hope to see it gradually develop until manual training for boys and girls will help to prepare the children of our schools for practical work."[26]

In sum, Atlanta's school reform removed the sitting Board of Education from office , strengthened the Superintendent and his staff at the expense of the Board, imposed economy measures on the schools and salary reductions on the teachers, and added manual training courses to the curriculum of the school system. The list makes the Atlanta experience sound very much like the tales of reform movements in northern cities, where an increasingly powerful elite has been said to have seized control over the public school school system, centralized power in the office of the Superintendent, and rationalized procedures throughout the system over the protests of the poor and working classes. A closer look at school reform in Atlanta, however, shows that the process of reform differed decisively from that described in the prevailing class-conflict model.

B. <u>The Politics of School Reform</u>

While the content of the school reforms in Atlanta was similar in many respects to that in other cities, the political process through which the reforms were carried out in Atlanta was quite different from that described in the literature which develops the class-conflict model of urban school reform. Traditional politics in the city were not organized in terms of class divisions, and civic and governmental institutions had been dominated since the Civil War by members of the traditional social and economic elite. School politics, in particular, were the almost exclusive preserve of the most eminent members of the city's business and professional classes. The issues which precipitated the school reform movement differed from the issues which led to educational reform in the North, and the political consequences of school reform in Atlanta were in several important respects the direct opposite of the consequences of reform in some Northern cities. In this section of the paper we shall describe the political process of educational reform in Atlanta, drawing attention in turn to each of these areas of contrast with the class-conflict model.

1. Pre-Reform Politics

Politics in Atlanta prior to the reform of the school system were hardly working class politics. Power in the city was virtually monopolized by members of the business, commercial, and professional elites. Atlanta's black citizens were not represented in city government after 1870, and they were deprived of what little political influence remained to them by the institution of the "white primary" in the early 1890s.[27] The white working class was significantly underrepresented in office as well, though the rival factions of Atlanta's elite required the support of the city's workers for electoral success and therefore competed for working-class votes.[28]

The pre-eminence of the city's elites in municipal politics was facilitated by the absence of party competition in Atlanta, where the Democratic Party was the only recognized political organization. Their pre-eminance was reflected in the putative ideological consensus which governed political discourse in Atlanta. The consensus was maintained in large part because of the ostensible need to maintain racial solidarity and keep Atlanta's black citizens out of power, and therefore to prevent the emergence of divisions in the white electorate.[29] The consequence was a political system based on the distribution of graft and patronage,[30] and divided along factional lines.[31] As the Atlanta Journal explained:

> The city council is elected in Atlanta on the theory that it is a non-political body; that it is to attend strictly to the city's business strictly on business principles.
>
> We regret that in its practice the council so often violates this theory. It is well-known that for several years past there have been two factions in the council.
>
> They have alternated in the control of that body, and the faction that has a majority for the time being has everything its own way so completely that the minority might as well not be there so far as the choice of department officials is concerned.

The two factions were led by J. W. English and W. H. Brotherton, and exhibited considerable continuity over time in membership. Brotherton was a prosperous dry-goods merchant with strong ties to the local branch of the American Protective Association and Atlanta's organized working class, while English was one of the region's leading industrialists and a large scale employer of leased convict labor, with his political base in the Chamber of Commerce.[32] Brotherton was the leader of the powerful Prohibition Club in city politics, while English often worked with Atlanta's liquor interests.[33] At the same time, however, the compositon of the two factions was subject to dramatic changes. In the municipal election of 1896, for example, a dispute between the labor and prohibition elements in the Brotherton faction caused the Atlanta Federation of Trades to break its customary political ties and endorse the English ticket.[34] In general, though, the factional split marked a division within the civic elite, rather than a division along status or class lines, and

the English faction tended to enlist the support of somewhat wealthier and more prestigious citizens, and to present more eminent candidates for office as well.[35]

Another factor of importance in the factional division was the part played in the struggle by Atlanta's two newspapers, the Journal and the Constitution. Rivalry between the two was to emerge as the predominant feature of Georgia politics in the 1900s, when the "progressive" faction led by Hoke Smith and the Journal vied with the "conservative" faction led by Clark Howell and the Constitution for political and economic control of the state. In the 1890s, however, political competition between the two was largely confined to the local arena, with the Journal generally allied with the several elements of the Brotherton faction and the Constitution with the traditional elites who dominated the English faction.[36]

A complicating factor in the municipal politics of Atlanta in these years was the persistence of personalistic "friends and neighbors" ties, which eroded factional divisions and occasionally transcended them altogether. The political ascendancy of Clark Howell's brother Albert within the Brotherton faction in 1896, for example, caused the Constitution to sever whatever ties had traditionally bound it to the English faction and to work vigorously for the election of the Brotherton ticket.[37] This in itself would probably have been enough to bring the Journal to endorse the English candidate, but the nomination of C. A. Collier for mayor by the English faction ensured the new alignment, for Hoke Smith had studied law in Collier's father's law firm, and Collier himself had been a member of the original corporation organized by Smith to purchase the Journal in the mid - 1880's.[38]

The portrait of Atlanta's political system which emerges from this account is thus one in which the principal function of municipal politics was the distribution of economic and political favors and powers between competing factions of the city's elite. Political conflicts were not based on disputes over issues--with the possible exception of prohibition--but rather over the control of city government and the economic and political advantages which could be reaped from it. Blacks and the white working class played virtually no role in city politics; they were unable to take part in the definition of issues or to contest seriously for office, and their political activities were largely restricted to efforts to trade votes to one faction or the other in return for a share of the favors which were to be dispensed. Blacks were deprived of even this power after the institution of the white primary, but white workers continued to gain occasional concessions from the factions. Though the factions were in some respects definable entities, their boundaries remained relatively fluid, and dramatic shifts in membership could and did occur. Personal antagonisms were frequently at the root of political rivalries, and "friends and neighbors" relationships frequently determined the alignment of forces within the factional struggle.

Thus, in contrast to the picture of urban politics described in the literature which develops the class-conflict model of urban reform, Atlanta politics in this era were not defined by conflict between classes. The city's business and professional leaders were in firm control of the economic and political institutions of the city, and such political conflicts as did emerge in these years emerged within the city's elite.

2. Elites and Traditional School Politics

The school board, in particular, was a bastion of power for Atlanta's traditional civic elite. In contrast to the history of many Northern cities, where the public school systems were stitched together over time from a patchwork of village, borough, and proprietary schools, the Atlanta school system was created by an act of the city council in 1872, and was therefore unified from the start. The school board was uniformly composed of members of the city's business and professional elites, and included some of Atlanta's wealthiest and most eminent citizens. Among them were men like L. P. Grant, the president of the Atlanta and West Point Railroad; Logan E. Bleckley, Georgia's best-known lawyer and subsequently Chief Justice of the Georgia Supreme Court; E. E. Rawson, a pioneer industrialist who had made his fortune in real estate; S. M. Inman, a cotton factor and reputedly the wealthiest man in Atlanta; and J. W. English.[39] Most important among the members of the school board, however, was Joseph E. Brown, who served as President of the board until his election to the U. S. Senate in 1888 and continued to dominate its deliberations until his death in 1894. Brown had served as the Confederate Governor of Georgia, and reigned as a member of the state's "Bourbon triumvirate" after Redemption, serving terms in the Senate and as Chief Justice of the Georgia Supreme Court. He was also president of the Western and Atlantic Railroad, the Southern Railway and Steamship Company, the Walker Iron and Coal Company, and the Dade Coal Company, and he was one of the wealthiest and most powerful men in the southeast.[40]

Members of the school board were appointed for seven-year terms, and they were routinely re-appointed if they were willing to serve.[41] With the exception of authority over annual appropriations to the school system, which was retained by the city council, power over the school system was fully vested in the board.[42] Exempted from political controversy by the wealth and status of its members, the nature of its charter, and the duration of its members' tenure, the pre-reform school board was essentially free to administer the schools according to its own conservative preferences, without regard for the exigencies of local electoral politics. Thus, in contrast to the situation commonly described in the literature on educational reform, in which traditional school politics were ward and neighborhood based and business and professional leaders imposed reforms on the poor and working classes, in Atlanta the school system was unified under the direction of "city-wide" interests from its inception, and reform was carried out at the expense of the traditional civic elite.

3. Issues in School Politics

The issues which precipated the reform of the Atlanta schools also differ from those described by the advocates of the class-conflict model of reform. While the demands of Mayor Collier for economy and efficiency in the administration of the school system were paralleled in other cities, other issues in contemporary school politics were unique to Atlanta. Disputes over textbook selection and the costs of textbooks to parents stimulated conflict between the school board and the city council, while the unavailing effort which was made to modernize the curriculum of the school system served to draw a clear line in local school politics between "progressive" reformers and the conservative majority on the school board. By far the greatest conflict was generated by the issue of corporal punishment, however, and the failure of the school board to abolish the practice in the Atlanta public school system led directly to the removal of the board members from office and to the subsequent reform of other aspects of the system.

Efforts to change educational policies in the Atlanta public school system proved largely unavailing in the years prior to 1897. The school board was dominated by conservative members of the city's traditional civic elite, and their wealth and status and the duration of their tenure effectively insulated the board from political pressures. Demands for changes in the school system were uncommon in these years, however, (with the notable exception of continuing efforts by Atlanta's black community to win more and better school facilities for its children,) and the "inertia" in the system caused relatively little controversy.[43]

In the mid-1890s, however, a number of educational issues emerged with a new intensity in Atlanta. Public protest arose over the Board's policies of textbook selection and the frequency with which new textbooks were assigned in the schools, because of the high textbook costs which parents were obliged to bear. This dispute culminated in the passage of a city council ordinance which required that textbooks -- once selected -- were to be used in the schools for a minimum of five years, and that the same books were to be used in all the schools of the system.[44]

Controversy also arose over issues of curricular reform: the city's traditional elites were opposed to nearly all changes in the curriculum of the system, while other Atlantans were angered by the school board's refusal to improve the public schools by instituting a departmental organization of the faculties in the Boys' and Girls' High Schools or by adding manual training and vocational subjects to the curriculum of the primary and secondary schools. On this issue the school board was adamant, and the efforts of the Mayor, the city council, and other concerned citizens to modernize the curriculum in the public school system proved almost entirely fruitless in the years prior to 1897.[45]

By far the largest public dispute arose over the issue of corporal punishment in the schools. Protest over the thrashing of recalcitrant children increased dramatically after 1890, and demands that the practice of corporal punishment be forbidden in the public school system were

directed to the school board by middle class parents, prominent citizens, and members of the city council with increasing frequency and impatience as the decade passed.[46] Atlanta's teachers, however, argued that the right to resort to a hickory switch was essential to the maintenance of order in the city's classrooms, and the school board sided with them.

Oppostion to the school board found its champion with the inauguration of Mayor Collier in 1897. As was noted above, Collier was quick to protest against the prodigality of the school board in its administration of the public school system, and he joined in the public controversy over other issues as well. From his position as an ex officio member of the board, he tried unsuccessfully to encourage curricular and other reforms in the system, and he worked hard for the abolition of corporal punishment. Declaring that no living man or woman would ever whip one of his children, the Mayor explained that the retention of corporal punishment in the public schools had led him to enroll his own children in private schools.[47] Taking over the leadership of the forces opposing the practice in the city, he circulated a petition among the influential citizens of Atlanta which demanded that teachers in the public schools be prohibited from whipping children. When he had collected over one hundred signatures -- from "persons whose names it was believed would have weight with the Board of Education"[48] -- he submitted the petition to the board.

The public outcry against corporal punishment was heightened further by noisy press coverage of a sensational case involving a student at the Boys' High School who had been severely beaten by a teacher after allegedly drawing a knife in the classroom. The controversy between the boy's father and the teacher was heard by a committee of the school board over a period of weeks, and a number of columns appeared in the city's newspapers in which the opinions of prominent citizens on the "all-absorbing topic of the hour" were published.[49] These too demonstrated increasingly widespread oppostion to the practice, but the Grievance Committee of the school board nevertheless found in favor of the teacher, and a measure introduced by Mayor Collier to abolish corporal punishment throughout the school system was defeated by the board by a vote of twelve to four.[50] Speaking for the board majority, D. A. Beattie asserted:[51]

> This movement is all nonsense. They don't do half enough whipping in the schools now, and it's foolish to talk about stopping it altogether.

The day after the vote was taken, the city council voted to abolish the school board, and among the first actions of the newly-appointed board was the prohibition of corporal punishment in the Boys' High School and the introduction of strict regulations governing its application in the city's elementary schools.

4. The Political Consequences of Reform

In further contrast with the class-conflict model of educational reform, the abolition of the school board and the subsequent reform of the Atlanta public school system were engineered not by a civic elite

intent upon seizing control of the public school system from the working class and its political allies, but rather by a coalition of groups within the civic elite comprising those like Mayor Collier who sought to reform the educational system and the members of the Brotherton faction inc ity politics who sought to exercise greater political control over the schools. The effect of school reform in Atlanta was thus to shift power over the educational system out of the hands of the traditional civic elite and into the hands of somewhat less prestigious men, including professional politicians and men with strong ties to the local labor movement.

The diversity of the public response to the change in boards makes this apparent. The Atlanta Journal, formally allied with the English faction in city politics, greeted the change with equanimity despite the key role played by the Brotherton faction because of Hoke Smith's tradtionally "progressive" sympathies and his ties with Mayor Collier, who had instigated the reform movement. In contrast, the Atlanta Constitution expressed violent outrage at the council's action, despite its recent affiliation with the Brotherton faction, because of the traditionally close ties between its editors and the conservative elites who had predominated on the "exterminated" board.[52] The Constitution devoted considerable attention to a mass meeting held on Saturday May 29, which passed resolutions denouncing the council's "illegal, revolutionary, despotic, and dangerous" action and attacking "the ring controlling our city government." The paper also published editorials which condemned the "odious conspiracy" which had planned the "extermination" of the school board and the "Star-Chamber procedure" which had carried it out.[53] While the Constitution called upon the citizens of Atlanta to rise up and force the council to rescind its action, the Journal declared that the response to the council's "coup" had for the most part been "of a pacific nature," and otherwise refrained from editorial comment.[54]

The members of the newly-appointed school board met the morning after their sudden election, and drafted a letter in which they called upon the council to reinstate the old board and find a more peaceful and less offensive method of accomplishing its goals for the school system. At the same time, however, the members of the new board expressed their gratification at having been appointed, and they ratified the council's right to do as it saw fit in the matter:[55]

> No fair-minded citizen can question the zeal, fidelity, and courage with which you are discharging the duties which the the votes of your fellow citizens placed upon you.

They also invoked educational authorities in support of the council's action:[56]

> We believe it to be true that the strongest thinkers upon the subject of municipal public schools advocate boards of education composed of a small number of members.

Three of the new board members who had especially close ties to the old board and the city's traditional elite declined to serve, but replacements were quickly elected by the city council.[57] After a meeting with Mayor Collier the following Monday, the members of the new board were duly sworn into office, and they held their first meeting that afternoon.

With the new board in place, both Atlanta newspapers urged resignation to the new dispensation.[58] The Atlanta Journal was especially sanguine:

> The matter so unexpectedly precipitated has been settled in the best way possible for the time being and in the way that will result in the least possible harm to the schools.

The Constitution, recognizing that no change in the situation was likely and conceeding that the members of the new board were all gentlemen and good citizens, contented itself with a call for the passage of an amendment to the city charter which would forbid the city council from removing school board members from office before the expiration of their terms, and thus prevent the recurrence of the council's recent coup. This call received the endorsement of the Journal and of Mayor Collier, and such an amendment was passed by the legislature the following December.[59]

The new members of the board differed from their immediate predecessors chiefly in their youth and in the openness of their political ties, though they were of marginally lower social status as well, as Table 2 shows. A longer view, however, shows that the 1897 change in boards ushered in a new era in Atlanta school politics. After the change, the school board was no longer controlled by the city's traditional social and economic elites, but by men of substantially lesser prestige, as can be seen in Table III. Members were appointed to shorter terms, and remained on the board for shorter periods than their predecessors had done. The average term of board members prior to 1897 was nearly eight years; after 1897 the average term was just over four years. In addition, members were appointed by wards after 1897, and were chosen more for their political connections and sensitivity to ward concerns than for their prominence in the city as a whole, as had been the case in the earlier period. While the old school board had been dominated by members of the civic elite, the new board was dominated by lawyers and minor politicians, and included representatives from a variety of interest groups, including organized labor.[60] Thus, in further contrast to the reform movements described in the literature informed by the class-conflict model, the political changes which accompanied the reform of the Atlanta public school system removed the city's traditional "downtown" elite from power over the school system and replaced them with men of lesser status and more particularistic, ward based concerns, thereby increasing the political responsiveness of the educational system. Whereas in New York, St. Louis, and other cities reformers worked to "get the schools out of politics," in Atlanta reformers accomplished the opposite result, and the schools became more closely integrated with the other institutions of city government.

TABLE 2

SOCIAL COMPOSITION OF ATLANTA SCHOOL BOARDS, 1897
(Percent)

Occupation	Old Board	New Board
Elite lawyers	18	14
Bank and corporation presidents	6	—
Total top elites	24	14
Other lawyers	29	43
Other professionals	12	—
Other bank and corporation officials	18	14
Realtors and insurance men	6	14
Proprietors	12	14
Employees	—	—
Unknown	—	—
N	(17)	(7)

SOURCE: Atlanta, City Directories, 1897.

TABLE 3

SOCIAL COMPOSITION OF ATLANTA SCHOOL BOARD, 1872-1918
(Percent)

Occupation	1872-1897		1897-1918	
	Members	Board Years	Members	Board Years
Elite lawyers	18	16	7	13
Bank and corporation presidents	20	31	—	—
Total top elites	38	47	7	13
Other lawyers	11	8	29	30
Other professionals	16	15	7	7
Other bank and corporation officials	11	6	18	18
Realtors and insurance men	5	5	20	16
Proprietors	18	20	13	11
Employees	—	—	4	5
Unknown	—	—	2	1
N	(44)	(347)	(45)	(184)

SOURCE: Atlanta, City Directories, 1872-1918.

C. The Causes of Educational Reform in Atlanta

Speculation as to the causes of the council's "astounding coup" was rampant in the midst of the controversy. Mayor Collier, as spokesman for the "combine" which had carried out the reform, asserted that the council had acted only in order to make the administration of the schools more efficient:[61]

> There is no significance to the movement except that the board was too large and we thought to cut it down. None of the old members were re-elected because we did not want to offend half of them by leaving them off.

This explanation was sufficient for the Atlanta Journal, which stated:[62]

> The real meaning of the present action, as it appears to disinterested onlookers, is that the mayor and the general council think the present board of education is organized on a wrong principle, and has sic taken the foregoing method of bringing about a change.

At the same time, however, the Journal suggested that "the entire school system of the city may be revolutionized by this change of boards," and reminded its readers of the recent disputes between Mayor Collier and the old board over the questions of teacher salaries and corporal punishment, and of the upcoming election of the system's superintendent and teaching force as well.[63]

The Constitution took a much harsher view of the council's action, asserting that the change in boards was a consequence of the corruption and greed of the "ring" of professional politicians that dominated city politics, and declaring that it meant the end of the political independence of the public school system:[64]

> The most vicious feature connected with it, apart from the contemptuous disregard of public opinion which originated and carried it through, is the fact that it throws our entire public school system into the very center of the whirlpool of political agitation . . . . At any hour of the day or night--especially night--it may become the victim of some political combination and suffer the deadliest results of secret deals, jobs, and manipulations.

In an editorial cartoon entitled "The Public School System as a Factor in Municipal Politics," the Constitution portrayed a number of well-fed and nattily-dressed politicians and ward heelers in a variety of characteristic attitudes: huddling beneath a shaded lamp under the motto, "Damn the People"; striking a pose with a bag of "boodle" in one hand and a schoolhouse in the other; and soliciting voters on election day with the declaration, "I kin turn dem the board members out at a moment's notice." The cartoon also presented a parade of board members, marching into and out of office at the direction of the heelers, and "some of the victims" of the council's action--the students and teachers of the Atlanta public school system.[65]

A text for the cartoon was presented in an editorial the following day:[66]

> Meanwhile, there ought to be great joy among those who live by politics alone, the ward heelers, the runners, the eaters of the crumbs that fall from the table of municipal government. The precedent set by council is so much to their taste, and so thoroughly in their line of business that they will be ungrateful if they do not give a banquet to those who have played into their hands by furnishing forth a feast of such pickings as may be wrung from our public school system.

These fears were quieted somewhat by Mayor Collier's endorsement of the proposal to amend the city charter to protect the future independence of the school board, and were quieted even further by the protestations of the new board members that they consented to serve only to safeguard the continued well-being of the school system and to ensure that the schools were not disrupted by the surprising events of the past week. The conservatism of the new board was emphasized by acting president Howard Van Epps:[67]

> I smell no smoke of revolution. I believe the new board will prove as conservative as the old board had shown itself to be . . . . We have no object in view save the public good.

He was seconded in this view by Hoke Smith, who was to dominate the new school board as Joseph E. Brown had dominated the old:[68]

> I wish to act with an extreme degree of conservatism. I believe it would be unwise and injurious to inaugurate any radical changes. I remain on the board temporarily only with the intent to prevent, as far as possible, any change in the schools calculated to jar or in any way injure the schools.

Reassured, the Constitution declared that the new board members were all conservative and respectable men who would no doubt administer the schools as independently and wisely as had their predecessors. Conclusive evidence of the conservatism of the new school board was provided when the board re-elected the extremely conservative W.F. Slaton to the office of Superintendent. Slaton had filled the post since 1879, and had generally sided with the old board of education in its disputes with the mayor and council. Despite his skepticism toward educational innovations, he endorsed the reforms which had been carried out by the new board, and he continued to serve as Superintendent of the Atlanta public school system until 1907, when he was replaced by his son.[69]

Each of these contemporary explanations of the Atlanta school reform offers a partial view of the causes of the reform, which can best be assessed in three inter-related groups. The proximate causes of the reform were the conflicts which had arisen between the city council and the school board in the mid-1890s. These were brought on by the apparent unwillingness of the members of the school board to abolish corporal punishment, adopt curricular innovations, or otherwise reform the school system in any way. The vehement opposition of Atlanta's

traditional elites to changes in the organizational or administrative character of the schools, and the consequent "inertia" in the public school system were a source of increasing public controversy in the mid-1890s, and had come to represent a real obstacle to the continued growth and development of the school system and the city as a whole by 1897. The conflicts were encouraged also by the refusal of the school board to subordinate itself to the will of the mayor or the city council, on either financial or policy questions. The board's resistance to Mayor Collier's efforts to put the school system on a "sound business basis" through cuts in teacher salaries and other economy measures was intolerable to the mayor and the city council, especially in light of the ongoing national depression and the recent reduction in the city's anticipated revenues.

More generally, the reform of the Atlanta school system had its roots in the desires of the Mayor and the city council to reduce the independent political power of the school board and to subordinate the board and the system it directed to the authority of Atlanta's political leaders. The old board was dominated by the city's traditional, conservative elites, and over time it had come to place an independent value on the welfare of the school system and the teachers without sufficient regard to the competing demands for the city's limited resources faced by the Mayor and the council. In addition, the domination of the board by Atlanta's traditional elites--some of whom had served almost since the inauguration of the public school system in 1872--stalled the school system in an extended period of inertia, in which the need for changes and improvements in the organization and administration of the school system and contemporary ideas about reform were viewed with equal skepticism by the school board.

Finally, Mayor Collier and other members of the "combine" which engineered the reform of the school system--especially Hoke Smith--were self-conscious advocates of a modern, industrialized, and prosperous "New South," with Atlanta as its regional capital, and they worked throughout their lives to bring their vision into reality. They were cognizant of contemporaneous reform movements in other cities, and aware of the ideas of educational experts and reformers elsewhere. Dedicated to the modernization of their region, they were alive to the contributions which a modern, reformed school system could make to the development of Atlanta and the South, and they chafed at the obstacle to development posed by the traditional, inefficient organization of the public school system and the domination of the system by the city's traditional civic elite. The city had grown beyond the point at which it could be well-served by the old system of public education, and the school system had grown beyond the point at which it could respond to the needs of the growing city under its traditional mode of organization and administration.

Conclusion

In this paper we have shown that the Atlanta school reform is described only poorly by the class-conflict model which has lately prevailed in the literature on urban school reform. Despite the temporal coincidence of the Atlanta reform with similar movements elsewhere, and the parellels between many of the Atlanta reforms and the reforms carried out in other cities, we have shown that the movement for educational reform in Atlanta was not carried out against the wishes of a locally-oriented working class, as was apparently the case in some other cities. Instead, the Atlanta reforms were brought about by a faction of the city's elite which was self-consciously dedicated to the modernization and development of the city and the region, and the reforms were carried out at the expense of precisely the sort of economic and political elites whose interests were supposedly so well served by the reformers in other cities. As opposed to the shift in power from ward politicians to city-wide elites and educational experts which occurred elsewhere, the Atlanta reforms resulted in a shift of power from the city's traditional civic elite to men of lesser status who were better attuned to the demands of ward and patronage politics. While a shift in administrative power from the board to the Superintendent did occur in Atlanta, the new board retained W.F. Slaton in office, despite his conservatism, and power over educational policy was exercised by the board members. The working class was not a visible participant in the reform movement, either in support or in opposition, but the faction ordinarily supported by the city's labor movement was the one which engineered the reform.

Clearly, the political process through which educational reform was carried out in Atlanta in 1897 was distinctly different from the contemporaneous political processes which brought reform to the public school systems of New York, Philadelphia, St. Louis, and other cities; and many of the political consequences of the reform in Atlanta were precisely contrary to the consequences of reform in the other cities. The overwhelming political significance of the racial division in the Southern population and the persistence in power of a conservative, paternalistic, "Bourbon" elite established a context in which urban politics in the South was very different from urban politics in the North, and Southern movements for reform took dramatically different courses from their Northern counterparts. The absence of a large immigrant population, the political weakness of the white working class, and the importance universally assigned by whites to the maintenance of white supremacy and black exclusion created a political environment in the South in which educational reform was necessarily sponsored by different groups and directed to different ends than was often the case in the North.

At a minimum, this finding suggests that the utility of the class-conflict model of educational reform is limited to those large cities of the industrialized North which shared a number of economic and political attributes, including a sizable immigrant population and a large and politically-organized working class. The general applicability claimed by some of the bolder proponents of the class-conflict model of reform is thus shown to be unwarranted: the political process

of educational reform was constrained by the political environment within which reform took place, and divergent political contexts generated dissimilar movements for reform. The class-conflict model may be useful for explaining the politics of educational reform in the largest cities of the North, but different models reflecting the diversity of political contexts are required in order to explain reform movements in other cities and other regions.

Ultimately, however, the similarities between the Atlanta school reform and reform movements in other cities are of greater significance than the differences between them. In spite of the marked contrasts between the political processes of reform in Atlanta and elsewhere, the content of the reforms which were implemented in various urban school systems was essentially the same. The size of the school board and the number of board committees were reduced, and administrative power over the school system was centralized in the office of the Superintendent and his staff. Measures reducing teacher salaries and other school system expenditures were instituted. The curriculum was modernized, and manual training and other vocationally-oriented courses were added to the offerings of elementary and secondary schools. The differences between the political processes through which school reforms were carried out in Atlanta and in other cities are themselves epiphenomenal in light of the practically identical reforms which were finally implemented in the various cities.

This finding suggests that the multiple tasks required of big-city school systems and the many constituencies which such systems are required to serve shape their development in ways which are largely independent of local political circumstances. The explosive growth of urban populations and the rapid expansion and diversification of urban economies were common to all regions at the turn of the century, as were the pervasive after-effects of the Depression of 1893-1897, and the exigencies imposed upon urban school systems by rapidly rising enrollments, reduced revenues, and a changing occupational structure prescribed a common character for big-city educational reforms which had relatively little to do with the political processes which led to reform in each city. Urban school systems thus came to resemble one another not so much because of the political circumstances which shaped them as because of the attributes of function, complexity, and size which they had in common.

The advocates of the class-conflict model of urban educational reform have argued that the reform movements which transformed many big-city school systems around the turn of the century were rooted in the ambitions of educational experts and their middle-class allies to restrict the political power of the urban working class and to take control of the public school system for themselves. In support of this argument, they have suggested that there is a necessary connection between the political processes which lead to reform and the content of the reforms themselves, and they have therefore contended that the reforms which were implemented in the public school systems of many cities at the turn of the century necessarily reflected the values and interests of the middle class and were hostile to the values and interests of

the poor and working classes. On the basis of our analysis of the Atlanta experience with educational reform, we argue in contrast that the political processes which led to reform in particular cities had little effect on the content of the reforms which were finally instituted, and therefore that the presumed correspondence between the political aspirations of the sponsors of reform movements and the supposed "class content" of specific reforms is illusory. In the final analysis, it was not class conflict which shaped urban school systems, but rather the demographic and economic transformation which overcame all major American cities around the turn of the century. This transformation eclipsed local political differences, and patterned the development of big-city school systems throughout the country along increasingly similar lines as the century progressed.

FOOTNOTES

[1]A classic statement of the class-conflict model, together with a valuable summary of the literature can be found in Banfield and Wilson, 1963. Other important contributions include Burnham, 1970; Holli, 1969; Hayes, 1972; Marton, 1957; Hawley, 1973; Hofstadter, 1955; Mowry, 1963; Hays, 1964; Lineberry and Fowler, 1967; Shefter, 1977; Wiebe, 1962; Kolko, 1963; Chambers and Burnham, 1967; and Wiebe, 1967.

Wolfinger and Field, 1966, critique the class-conflict model and provide some compelling negative evidence.

[2]Hofstadter, 1955; Lazerson, 1971.

[3]Wiebe, 1967.

[4]Kolko, 1963; Hays, 1964; Bowles and Gintis, 1976.

[5]Among the many studies of school reform, the following are of particular interest: Katz, 1968; Katz, 1971; Tyack, 1974; Cronin, 1973; Salisbury, 1970; Callahan, 1962; Ziegler, Jennings and Peak, 1974; Lazerson, 1971; Greer, 1976; Bowles and Gintis, 1976.

[6]Atlanta Journal, May 28, 1897; Atlanta Constitution, May 29, 1897.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Atlanta Constitution, May 29, 1897.

[9]Atlanta Constitution, May 30, 1897.

[10]Atlanta Journal, May 31, 1897; Atlanta Constitution, June 1, 1897.

[11]In discussing the class-conflict model of educational reform, we emphasize especially the treatments of reform movements in specific cities provided by Ravitch, 1974; Gersman, 1970; and Issel, 1970; and the more general surveys of urban school reform by Katz, 1971; Bowles and Gintis, 1976; and especially Tyack, 1974.

[12]Grady, 1890; and Cooper, 1895.

[13]Grantham, 1958; and Urban, 1978.

[14]Atlanta Journal, August 28, 1896.

[15]Atlanta Journal, February 6, 1897.

[16]Atlanta Journal, January 28, 1897.

[17]Atlanta Board of Education. Minutes. February 15, 1897.

[18]Atlanta Board of Education. Report. 1897, p. 12.

[19]Atlanta Journal, January 28, 1897.

[20]Atlanta Journal, February 1, 1897.

[21]Atlanta Board of Education. Minutes. February 15, 1897.

[22]Atlanta Board of Education. Report. 1898, p. 18.

[23]Atlanta Board of Education. Reports. 1896-1910.

[24]Atlanta Board of Education. Report. 1898, pp. 82-104.

[25]Atlanta Board of Education. Report. 1898, p. 14.

[26]Atlanta Board of Education. Report. 1900, p. 21.

[27]Watts, 1978, Chapters 3 and 4; Watts, 1974.

[28]Watts, 1978, Chapter 2.

[29]This consensus was maintained on very much the same terms into the middle of the twentieth century. See Key, 1949, for a discussion.

[30]Atlanta Journal, March 1, 1897.

[31]Atlanta Journal, August 11, 1896.

[32]Atlanta Journal, February 2 and 19, 1897. See also Watts, 1973; Bolden, 1979; and Jenkins, 1974, for a discussion of the factional split.

[33]Atlanta Journal, February 3, 1897.

[34]Atlanta Journal, August 8-12, 1897.

[35]On the 1897 city council, for example, all five of the English partisans were mentioned in contemporary honorary biographies, while only one of the ten Brotherton representatives was mentioned.

[36]Grantham, 1958; Bolden, 1979.

[37]Atlanta Constitution, August 29, 1896.

[38]Southern Historical Association, 1895; Grantham, 1958.

[39]Southern Historical Association, 1895; Martin, 1902; Cooper, 1934.

[40]Woodward, 1971, pp. 13-14.

[41]Strickland, 1980.

[42]Racine, 1969, Chapter 1.

[43]Turner, 1979; Racine, 1969. The term is Racine's.

[44]Atlanta City Council. Minutes. April 19, 1894.

[45]Racine, 1969, Chapters 1 and 2.

[46]Strickland, 1980.

[47]Atlanta Journal, April 19, 1897.

[48]Ibid.

[49]Atlanta Journal, April 5, 1897.

[50]Atlanta Journal, May 28, 1897.

[51]Atlanta Journal, April 22, 1897.

[52]Atlanta Constitution, May 30-June 1, 1897.

[53]Atlanta Constitution, May 29, 1897.

[54]Atlanta Constitution, May 30, 1897; Atlanta Journal, May 29, 1897.

[55]Atlanta City Council. Minutes. May 29, 1897.

[56]Ibid.

[57]Ibid. Among the three was ex-president W.S. Thomson, the sole member of the old board to be appointed to the new board.

[58]Atlanta Journal, May 31, 1897.

[59]Atlanta Constitution, June 1, 1897; Atlanta Journal, May 30, 1897; Georgia State Legislature. Report. December 10, 1897.

[60]Atlanta City Directories, 1872-1918.

[61]Atlanta Constitution, May 29, 1897.

[62]Atlanta Journal, May 28, 1897.

[63]Ibid.

[64]Atlanta Constitution, May 30, 1897.

[65]Ibid.

[66]Atlanta Constitution, May 31, 1897.

[67]Atlanta Journal, May 31, 1897.

[68]Ibid.

[69]Atlanta Constitution, June 15, 1897; Racine, 1969, Chapters 3 and 4.

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